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Key Senators Agree to Take Action As Ocean Crisis Worsens

Joint Ocean Commission Responds to Senate Request to Develop Congressional Priority Plan

From Sea to Shining Sea: Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform

Washington, DC – A bipartisan group of ten influential Senators have agreed to take action on comprehensive reform of the nation's ocean policy as the problems with our troubled seas continue to grow worse. A national ocean policy action plan for Congress, *From Sea to Shining Sea: Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform*, developed at the Senators' request, was delivered to Capitol Hill today by the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and will serve as a guide for developing legislation and funding high-priority programs.

The action plan responds to the Senators' request to identify the most urgent priorities for congressional action to protect, restore, and maintain the marine ecosystem. The plan includes the top ten steps Congress should take to address the most pressing challenges, the highest funding priorities, and the most important changes to federal laws and the budget process to establish a more effective and integrated ocean policy.

From Sea to Shining Sea calls for Congress to adopt a statement of national ocean policy that acknowledges in legislation the importance of oceans to the nation's economic and ecological health and establishes a framework for all other ocean legislation. Among the pressing priorities:

- Establishing a strengthened National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in law and working with the Bush Administration to improve federal agency coordination on ocean and coastal issues;
- Enacting legislation to create incentives for ecosystem-based management that builds upon existing and emerging regional efforts to involve federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as well as the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions; and
- Reauthorizing an improved Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that relies more strongly on science to guide management actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of U.S. fisheries.

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“Three years ago the Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy sounded the alarm on the state of our oceans. While we did a good job helping everyone understand that oceans and coasts are in serious trouble, we have been unable to transform that insight into any sustained momentum to develop and implement a new framework for ocean policy,” said Leon E. Panetta, Joint Initiative co-chair.

“While the crisis continues to intensify, there has been limited progress over the last few years towards instituting the broad policy and institutional changes called for the by Commissions,” he added.

In addition, the report urges Congress to:

- Enact ocean and coastal legislation that has made significant progress through the legislative process in the 109th Congress;
- Incorporate ocean-related science and education into the new national innovation and competitiveness initiative, capitalizing on the growing economic potential associated with our oceans and the attraction they hold for students;
- Enact legislation to authorize and fund the Integrated Ocean Observing System;
- Accede to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, allowing the U.S. to share its expertise, capitalize on economic opportunities, and protect its sovereign interests;
- Establish an Ocean Trust Fund in the U.S. Treasury as a dedicated source of funds for improved management and understanding of ocean and coastal resources by the federal and state governments; and
- Secure additional funding to support management, science, and education programs that are the foundation of robust national ocean policy.

“We must be more aggressive if we hope to repair and protect the oceans and coasts, vital components of our national security, economic security, food security, recreation, and environmental health,” said William Ruckelshaus, Joint Initiative member. “It’s no overstatement to say that oceans are essential to human survival. They are responsible for the air we breathe, and support a significant portion of our economy, yet we continue to destroy their life-sustaining capacity and compromise their ability to provide goods and services we’ve come to rely upon.”

“There is really no dispute about the nature and severity of the threats confronting the oceans,” said Panetta. “We heard from hundreds of citizens, scientists, industry groups, environmental organizations, and elected officials and found broad consensus on the problems, which are outlined in *From Sea to Shining Sea*.” Among these are:

- Fragmented laws, confusing and overlapping jurisdiction, and the absence of a coherent national ocean policy.
- A lack of coordinated federal support for emerging regional ocean and coastal governance initiatives.
- Overexploited fisheries, poor water quality and the loss of critical habitat.
- A dearth of U.S. leadership in international ocean and coastal forums.
- Dwindling U.S. investment in ocean and coastal research, science, and education.

- Inadequate funding for federal agencies and for nonfederal partners at the regional, state, and local level.

Details on this top ten list, and further recommendations of the Joint Initiative can be found in the report located at: www.jointoceancommission.org.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, five from each Commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform.